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ABSTRACT

A lesson plan, divided into four learning activities, introduces the topic of Zen Buddhism by presenting one of many possible approaches to the academic study of religion in a secondary setting. The lesson plan is designed for integration into world history, global studies, or sociology classes in secondary schools. Learning activity one focuses on Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, activity two examines practices in Zen Buddhism, activity three discusses additional practices in Zen Buddhism, and activity four investigates two schools of Zen, Dr. Suzuki's view, and Zen's influence on Japanese society. Each learning activity is divided into three or four parts, including a vocabulary list and student projects. The document concludes with a listing of 11 suggested readings. (RSL)

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INTRODUCTION
to
ZEN BUDDHISM

by Virginia Strawn

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INTRODUCTION TO ZEN BUDDHISM

This lesson plan introduces the topic of Zen Buddhism. It is designed for integration into world history, global studies or sociology classes in secondary schools. The author is Virginia E. Strawn, a teacher and associate director of the Indiana Religion Studies Project.

In recent years, Zen Buddhism has made a place for itself in Western thought, capturing the interest of American and European artists, philosophers, psychotherapists and theologians, as well as ordinary lay persons. Therefore, Zen is significant for classroom study today, not only as a fascinating branch of a major world religion but also as an influence on 20th-century American thought and culture. In addition, Zen is a little easier for the western mind to understand than some other eastern religions and therefore can serve as a bridge between these philosophical worlds.

This sample lesson plan represents one of many possible approaches to the academic study of religion in a secondary setting. These materials may be duplicated for classroom use only.

A Project of the East Asian Studies Center and the Social Studies Development Center

LEARNING ACTIVITY 1

Focus: Buddhism and Zen Buddhism

Objective: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of these subjects by participating in class activities.

Prodecures:

Part A

The teacher will give a lecture including the following information, and lead a discussion around its content.

Buddhism, one of five major world religions, was founded in India in the 6th century B.C.E. by Siddhartha Gautama who later became known as the Buddha. His teachings are summarized in what he called the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Buddhism spread from India to China to Japan, Korea, Burma, Sri Lanka, and other east Asian nations. Unlike the Judeo-Christian belief in a personal God outside the universe, the Buddhists see the universe as an indissoluble whole of which man is just one part. The two major divisions within Buddhism are Mahayana, the more permissive, many-sided school of Buddhism, and Hinayana (or Theravada), the more conservative school.

Mahayana is itself divided into a number of sects. They are: 1) Pure Land Sect (one of the most popular and widespread branches of Mahayana Buddhism), 2) Intuitive Sects, 3) Rationalist Sect and 4) Sociopolitical Sect.

The Intuitive Sects are made up of Buddhists who believe that religions truths come from a sudden flash of insight or intuition, rather than from rational thought processes, faith in a particular deity or the study of scripture. These intuitive Buddhists look to the Buddha as an example, pointing out that he did not find the truth by studying with gurus or practicing ascetism. The Buddha finally just sat down under the bodhi tree and meditated. After several weeks, truth came to him in a flash of insight or inspiration. Therefore, the intuitive Buddhists claim that this intuition after meditation (for a short or long amount of time) is the key to Buddhist truth. Their aim is to experience this intuition. Satori is the word used to describe a flash of insight or particular state of consciousness; years of repeated, ever-deepening Satori experiences yield a state of consciousness which is thought to be comparable to the level the Buddha reached while meditating under the bodhi tree.

The word for meditation in India is dhyana, in China, ch'an, and in Japan, zen. Zen Buddhism, then, is the Buddhism of the intuitive sects, using its Japanese label. Zen's goal is the same as Indian Buddhism's goal, that is, the attainment of an absolute, ultimate knowledge lying beyond all change and opposition. However, the Zen's

way of reaching this goal is different.

The Intuitve Sects were not founded until after the 6th century A.D. with the help of a monk named Bodhidharma who brought these ideas from India to China. From here they spread to Korea and Japan, probably reaching Japan around the 11th or 12th century.

One of the basic beliefs underlying all Intuitive Sects is that people have to learn the truth of religion and life by themselves; therefore scriptures or temples or statues of deities are not necessary or useful. For example, the Buddha reportedly said, "Look within, thou art the Buddha," and on his deathbed, "Be a lamp unto yourself . . . [W]ork out your own salvation with diligence." Intuition, not explication, is the key. Experience is valued over doctrine.

Part B

Vocabulary words will be assigned for homework: intuition, insight, reasoning, satori and zen.

Part C.

Students will meet in small groups to discuss their own personal experiences of knowing by intuition versus knowing by using reason or intellect. Each group will report one example to the entire class.

Part D.

Extra credit will be given to those students wishing to research and report jointly to the class on Buddhism's Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

Focus: Practices in Zen Buddhism

Objective: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of these subjects by participating in class activities.

Procedures:

Part A.

The teacher will give a lecture including the following information, and lead a discussion around its content.

The goal of Zen is to discover reality. There are a number of distinct teaching methods employed in helping students reach this goal.

1) For example, Zen practitioners believe that reason is an obstacle and gets in the way of people intuitively realizing the truth. Therefore two of the Zen teaching methods are used to

deliberately confuse a person's reason in order to allow an intuitive flash. The first method is the use of koans. Koans (pronounced ko - an) are riddles, tales or short statements that cannot be answered or solved using a rational process. Zen masters will give their students koans to "work" on during meditation in order to open up their intuitive minds. The answer a student gives to a particular koan also serves as a measure of the depth to which his intuitive mind has been opened thus far. Alan Watts has described koans as "spiritual dynamite." They are tools used to help the student reach the truth beyond reason or intellect. Below are some famous examples of koans:

"You have heard the sound of the clapping of 2 hands, but what is the sound of 1 hand clapping?"

"What was your original face -- the one you had before your parents gave birth to you?"

"A monk made a cart whose wheels had a hundred spokes. Take both front and rear wheels away and remove the axle; then what will it be?"

"A monk once said to a Zen Master, 'I have just arrived at your temple. Please teach me.'The Zen Master said, 'Have you had breakfast?' The monk said, 'Yes.' The Zen Master said, 'Then go wash your bowls.' The monk was suddenly enlightened."

2) In the second method used to confuse the reasoning mind of the student, the Zen master suddenly shouts or slaps or kicks him in the middle of his meditation. It is believed that when the ego steps aside and the student learns to use that mysterious energy embodied in "letting go," truth appears.

Part B.

A vocabulary word will be assigned for homework: koan.

Part C.

Each student will take one koan and write a short paragraph describing what a possible answer might be using intuition instead of reasoning. The teacher will encourage students to discuss their difficulty with this assignment and to link their experience with the purpose of koans for Zen practitioners.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 3

Focus: More practices in Zen Buddhism

Objectives: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of these subjects by participating in class activities.

Procedures:

Part A.

The teacher will give a lecture including the following information, and lead a discussion around its content.

There are other practices used in Zen to discover Reality.

3) Zazen is a very rigid and intensive meditation practice that is believed to be essential to self-realizaton. A description of this classic practice from Heinrich Dumoulin's A History of Zen Buddhism follows:

"If you wish to attain enlightenment, begin at once to practice zazen. For this meditation a quiet chamber is necessary, while food and drink must be taken in moderation. Free yourself from all attachments, and bring to rest the ten thousand things. Think of neither good nor evil and judge not right or wrong. Maintain the flow ofmind, of will, and of consciousness; bring to an end all desires, all concepts and judgments. Do not think about how to become a Buddha.

In terms of procedure, first put down a thick pillow and on top of this a second (round) one. One may choose either a full or half cross-legged position. In the full position one places the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. In the half position only theleft foot isplaced upon the right thigh. Robe and belt should be worn loosely, but inorder. The right hand rests on the left foot, while the back of the left hand rests in the palm of the right. The two thumbs are placed in juxtaposition.

The body must be maintained upright, without inclining to the left or to the right, forward or backward. Ears and shoulders, nose and navel must be kept in alignment respectively. The tongue is to be kept against the palate, lips and teeth are kept firmly closed, while the eyes are to be kep always open.

Now that the bodily position is in order, regulate your breathing. If a wish arises, take note of it and then dismiss it. In practicing thus persistently you will forget all attachments and concentration will come of itself. That is the art of zazen."[1]

Sesshin is an intensive meditation retreat program in which participants practice zazen 8-12 hours a day for 1 to 4 weeks.

4) Verbal sparring between students and between Zen master and student is used to test the student's level of understanding.

5) Another method used to discover Reality is the emphasis of daily existence as enlightenment itself. This humanistic emphasis on life in the here and now is illustrated quite

simply but profoundly in the following example:

Disciple: "What is the way to Wisdom?"

Master: "When hungry eat; when weary sleep."

After experiencing Satori or enlightenment,the Zen Buddhist is encouraged not to withdraw from the world but to be involved totally and completely to his full potential.

"Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.
After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water."

Part B.

A vocabulary word will be assigned for homework: zazen

Part C.

Each student will choose one of the two quotes and write his/her own version of it, reflecting an understanding of the meaning of the quote.

Part D.

Students will by tested on the five practices of Zen.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 4

Focus: Two schools of Zen, Dr. Suzuki's view of Zen, and Zen's influence on Japanese society

Objective: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of these subjects by participating in class activities

Procedures:

Part A.

The teacher will give a lecture including the following information and lead a discussion around its content.

There are two chief schools in Zen. The Rinzai school is the "sudden school" and the Soto school is the "gradual school." In the Rinzai school the emphasis is on reaching enlightenment as soon as possible, like a gardener who forces a tree to bear fruit fast. Using this same analogy, in the Soto school the gardener would let the tree grown and bear fruit at its natural rate. (The Soto school, for example, uses koans very little).

Intuitive Buddhism profoundly affected society in Japan. Zen's principles of beauty, simplicity, and profundity and its nonrational approach have influenced many areas of Japanese life, so much so that even today it is impossible to separate the Zen philosophy from the arts, disciplines and precepts it has

preserved or encouraged. (Examples of Zen-rooted activities include judo, archery, ceremonial swordsmanship and ceremonial tea drinking.)

Dr. Daisetz T. Suzuki, the Japanese scholar who deserves much of the credit for spreading the ideas of Zen throughout the West, eloquently explains the view of Zen Buddhists and what they seek:

> The world in which we live is an old world, yet we have not exhausted its contents, not only in larger things but in smaller things too. But we can never reach the end of our researches as long as we limit ourselves to the fields of sense and intellect. This is the very nature of the human constitution . . . .Yet strangely enough as soon as we quit the realm known as objectivity and turn inward and go in this direction with resolution and persistency, we finally come to a gate known as 'the gate of all wonders.' We enter it and find ourselves in the field of Emptiness where our being is firmly rooted. [This is the] treasure house behind the consciousness where all sorts of potentialities have been kept in imprisonment.[2]

Part B.

Students will explain in their own words the differences between the two schools of Zen and give an analogy of their own expressing those differences.

Part C.

Each student will give a written or oral report on an example of Zen principles influencing a particular activity (examples may be taken from the lecture, examples from the books listed below, or their own examples).

Part D.

Extra credit will be given for research and report or demonstration of the Tea Ceremony or the Ox-herding Pictures.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Nancy Wilson Ross, Three Ways of Asian Wisdom, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 247.

[2]Ross, p. 187.

FURTHER SUGGESTED READINGS

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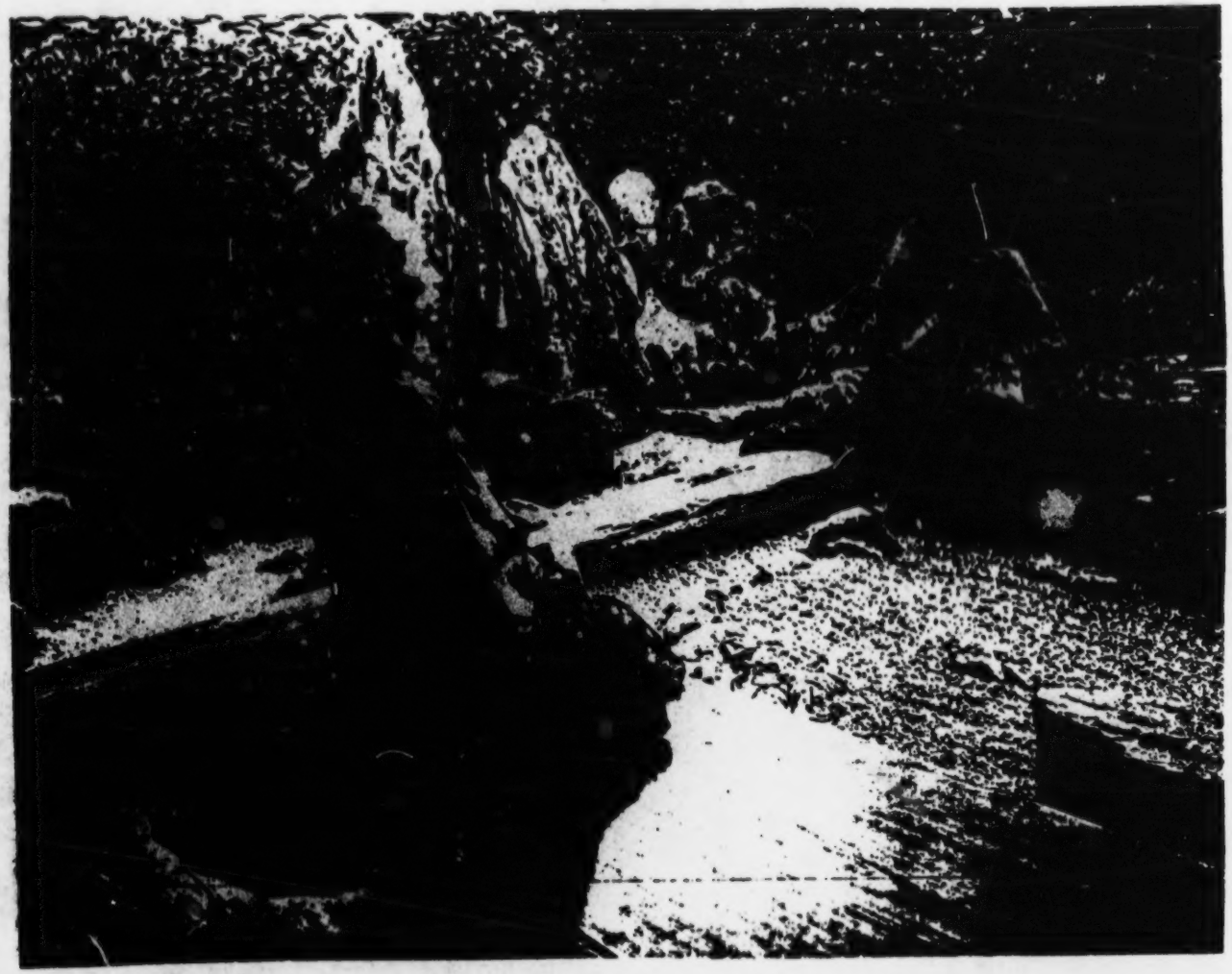

Since Zen r...ditation is a way of realizing oneness with the world, and is not an escape from it, the eyes of Zen monks are never quite closed. (Monk contemplating the monastery garden at Daitokuji Zen Temple, Kyoto, Japan, photo by Roloff Beny.)

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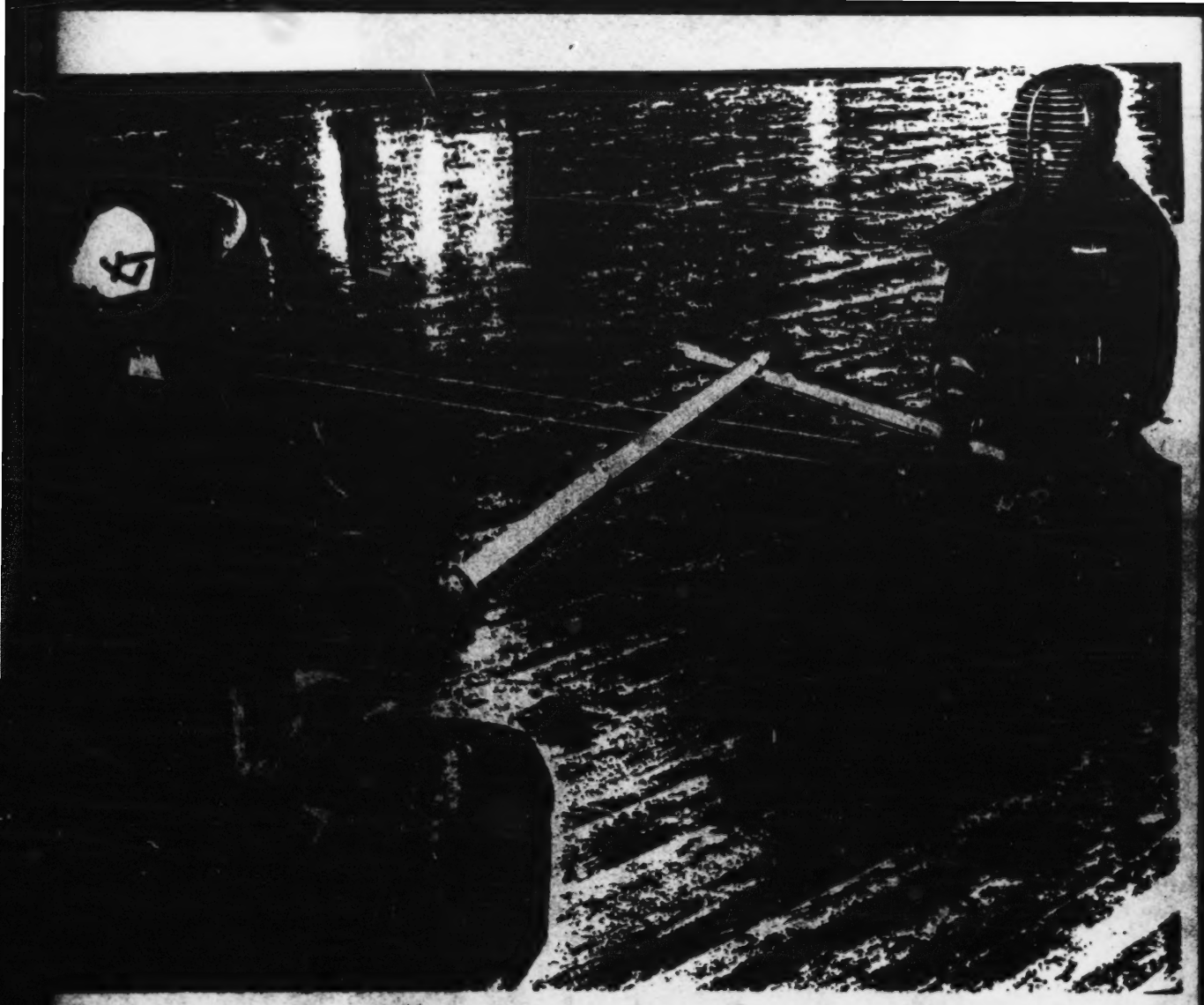

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In Kendo two swordsmen face each other in a meditation of oneness with action. 'Do' means way, or teaching method, and Kendo is the way of swordsmanship. Meditation does not always imply quietude or physical stillness. In Kendo the meditative state is one of absolute attentiveness and control. The mind is immovable, however much the body is moving to meet changing circumstances.

A Buddha statue in the attitude of supreme enlightenment sits among the leaves and flowers of the Ryoan-ji Zen Monastery garden in Kyoto.

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